

DAILY BULLETIN

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ANNUAL HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS SUPPORT FREEDOM WORLDWIDE

Year 2004 reports on 197 countries to be
released February 28

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Washington -- The U.S. State Department is scheduled to release its annual statement on the global condition of human rights on February 28. Titled "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the Year 2004," it examines the status of human rights in 197 countries.

Each country's report details its record and performance on protecting and promoting the rights enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These include respect for the integrity of the person, with sections on forced disappearances, imprisonment and torture; respect for civil liberties, covering freedom of speech, religion and press; respect for political rights, focusing on the right of people to choose their own governments; governmental attitude regarding international and nongovernmental investigation of alleged violations of human rights; discrimination based on race, sex, disability, language or social status; and workers' rights.

The scope of the human rights reports continue to widen and have steadily expanded to include additional areas of concern. For example, even though the reports first included the broad category of discrimination in 1986, they added specific sections on the rights of women and children, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and national, racial and ethnic minori-

ties in 1993. The 2004 country reports will cover three new categories: transparency and corruption, anti-Semitism and discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The annual human rights reports are mandated by a 1976 amendment to section 502b of the Foreign Assistance Act requiring the secretary of state to transmit to Congress by February each year "a full and complete report regarding the status of internationally recognized human rights" in countries receiving U.S. security assistance. The first human rights reports, released in 1977, covered the human rights conditions in 82 countries.

Since 1976, Congress has expanded the coverage of the human rights reports to include countries receiving U.S. economic aid as well as all members of the United Nations. The Department of State also prepares reports on countries that do not fall into the congressionally mandated categories, bringing the total to a record high of 197 countries in 2004.

With their ever-widening scope, the preparation of the human rights reports is a multipart process that requires the cooperation of a variety of actors in each country. U.S. embassies collect information throughout the year from sources across the political spectrum, including government officials, journalists, human rights organizations, academics and activists.

After a detailed verification process, the embassies produce an initial draft reports that are submitted to the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. The bureau then produces the final version of each country report in consultation with other department bureaus and sources. The final human rights reports -- now a multivolume document in their compiled, printed form -- are delivered to Congress and translated into various languages and placed on the Internet for dissemination worldwide.

The compiled human rights document is the most widely read State Department report, and it serves several purposes. The United States uses the reports as a basis for directing U.S. efforts to promote human rights protection, and as a resource to shape policy, conduct diplomacy and make assistance, training and other resource allocations.

As a result of their public release and wide dissemination, the reports also raise awareness of human rights violations and advocate on behalf of victims, said then-Secretary of State Colin Powell in the preface to

the 2003 reports. The compilation of a standardized, regular group of reports allows the United States -- and other governments and human rights advocates -- to measure progress or backsliding on human rights issues worldwide. The annual reports also reinforce "the high priority we place on raising the profile of human rights in our bilateral relationships," said Powell.

To draw attention to U.S. efforts to address issues raised in the human rights reports, the State Department produces a follow-up report, "Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record." This congressionally mandated report is scheduled to be released on March 25, one month after the human rights country reports. The department also monitors the status of specific international human rights issues through its annual reports on religious freedom and anti-Semitism.

The human rights reports will be available on February 28 at:

<http://www.usinfo.state.gov/>.

U.S., EUROPEANS WORKING JOINTLY AGAINST HIV/AIDS

Cooperation on Global Fund, trade agreements, vaccine development

The United States and the European Union are working together to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and are strengthening their efforts in this arena as President Bush meets with European leaders on his February 21-24 trip to the continent.

A fact sheet issued by the U.S. Department of State cites the cooperative initiatives of the United States and European nations in supporting the Global Fund for AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis; cooperating on trade rules to enable the developing world production of AIDS medicines; and working jointly in vaccine research and development programs.

The text of the fact sheet follows:

U.S. Department of State
Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs
Washington, DC

February 17, 2005

TURNING THE TIDE AGAINST HIV/AIDS

“HIV/AIDS is the greatest health crisis of our time. Its defeat requires the cooperation of the entire global community our country and other nations around the world are working to bring new hope to those suffering with HIV/AIDS and contribute to a healthier future for people around the world.”

-- President George W. Bush, December 1, 2004

The United States and the European Union (EU) continue to strengthen their cooperation to combat the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. In the June 2004 joint U.S.-EU Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis, the United States and the European Union reasserted our shared commitment to combat AIDS, including through:

Support for the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS;

-- Ensuring resources from the Global Fund for AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis are available to countries most severely affected by the disease;

-- Cooperating on amending World Trade Organization rules in accordance with our groundbreaking agreement on intellectual property rights and public health;

-- Supporting and accelerating the development of vaccines and technologies to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases; and

-- Working to promote donor coordination and civil society and private-sector involvement in the fight against AIDS.

President Bush is leading a global effort to combat HIV/AIDS through his historic \$15 billion Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and his commitment to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, to which the United States has pledged \$2.12 billion, or 36 percent of all pledges through 2008. The substantial U.S. contribution to the Global Fund serves as both an invitation and a challenge to the rest of the international community to join in our commitment. The Emergency Plan and other U.S. efforts were achieved in close in-country coordination with EU and other donors through the UNAIDS/World Health Organization “Three Ones” framework.

On June 10, 2004, President Bush and his G-8 counterparts endorsed the establishment of a Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise (GHAVE), a virtual consortium to accelerate HIV vaccine development by enhancing coordination, information sharing, and collaboration globally. President Bush is fulfilling his commitment to the Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise strategic plan through the establishment of a new, virtual HIV Vaccine Research and Development Center, in addition to the one at the National Institutes of Health under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). First-year funding through the Department of Health and Human Services for HIV/AIDS immunology at the center is expected to be \$14.4 million, and the President’s budget for FY2006 includes \$48 million. The new center is a key component of the Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise.

The U.S. and the EU also collaborate on HIV vaccine development through clinical trials of candidate HIV vaccines developed with EuroVac and European-based pharmaceutical firms, as well as on the development of topical microbicides for the prevention of HIV infection through the Integrated Preclinical/Clinical Program for HIV Topical Microbicides (IPCP-HTM). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the European Commission Directorate General for Research will hold a follow-up meeting in Barcelona on June 2-4, 2005.

The United States invested \$452 million of the global total of approximately \$650 million in public and private funding for HIV vaccine development in FY2004 and will provide approximately \$507 million in FY2005 and over \$600 million in FY2006. Of this amount, the U.S. provided \$10 million in FY2004 to the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative to foster integration of HIV vaccine development with EU researchers.

A series of fact sheets was issued by the State Department’s Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs in connection with President Bush’s February 21-24 trip to Europe. They are available on the State Department’s Bureau of International Information Programs’ Europe and Eurasia Web page, at:

<http://usinfo.state.gov/eur/>

U.S. PRAISES QATAR'S ECONOMIC GROWTH, URGES MORE REFORMS

U.S. comments coincide with WTO report on Qatar

The United States has praised Qatar for impressive economic growth of about 9 percent annually in recent years, and has urged it to adopt further reforms to make an even more attractive target for foreign investment.

"Qatar's GDP growth has been impressive, and sound monetary policy has brought inflation under control. And, as the Secretariat Report notes, rising incomes have led to a more diverse pattern of imports, making Qatar an attractive market for exporters and investors. Qatar's task is to further diversify its economy," said U.S. Representative to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Linnet Deily February 21.

Deily made her comments on the occasion of the WTO's first periodic review of Qatar's trade policies since Qatar acceded to the WTO in 1996. The WTO also praised the effectiveness of Qatar's development strategy while noting that its economy remains highly dependent on hydrocarbons. It also notes that foreign investors are excluded from the banking, insurance and commercial services sectors and urges Qatar to review its tariff and privatization policies.

Deily said that Qatar should review trade and investment policies that inhibit greater economic growth, such as unclear regulations on import licensing, restrictions on foreign investment and inadequate protection of intellectual property rights.

Following is text of Deily's remarks:

WTO TRADE POLICY REVIEW OF QATAR
Statement by Ambassador Linnet Deily
U.S. Representative to the WTO
Geneva,
February 21, 2005

Thank you, Chair. The United States warmly welcomes Commerce Minister Al-Thani and his team to Qatar's first trade policy review. The Secretariat and the Government of Qatar have done an excellent job in giving us the factual basis for this review, and we very much appreciate the time, effort, and insight of our discussant, Dr.

Farahat, whose comments have been helpful in thinking about Qatar's trade policies.

Several years ago - in late 2001 - all of our governments met in Doha and shared the momentous accomplishment of launching the Doha Development Agenda. Many of us - Ambassador Zoellick included - have commended Qatar for its invaluable role in hosting and facilitating the launch of the negotiations at a pivotal time for the global economy. We owe Qatar a debt of gratitude for its contribution and we look forward to Qatar's full participation in this very important phase of negotiations.

Clearly, Qatar has made substantial economic progress in recent years, becoming one of the world's highest income economies. Powered by the development and export of huge natural gas reserves, Qatar's GDP growth has been impressive, and sound monetary policy has brought inflation under control. And, as the Secretariat Report notes, rising incomes have led to a more diverse pattern of imports, making Qatar an attractive market for exporters and investors. Qatar's task is to further diversify its economy, a challenge the government is pursuing through its promotion of investment in small and medium-sized enterprises that use hydrocarbon by-products and its opening of some service sectors to foreign investment.

The United States is proud to be a leading partner in Qatar's economic growth and economic reform efforts. At the 2004 signing of the U.S.-Qatar Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, Ambassador Zoellick highlighted America's gains from trade with Qatar. The United States is the largest supplier of merchandise imports to Qatar. But the economic and social linkages between our countries go deeper and include the \$40 billion American companies have invested in Qatar's petroleum and natural gas sectors and branch campuses in Qatar of US universities such as Cornell, Texas A&M, and Carnegie-Mellon University.

The United States shares Qatar's view - as expressed in the Government Report - that WTO Members should have the right to enjoy international trade relations based on equal opportunity. This is one of the bedrock principles of the multilateral trading system, and it is achieved by the effective implementation of WTO obligations. In this context, we commend Qatar's notification that it has accepted the TBT Code of Good Practice. This is a welcome first step in addressing our concerns about Qatar's implementation of its SPS and TBT obligations.

As a next step, we strongly encourage Qatar to follow the example of two fellow GCC members, Bahrain and Oman, and cease applying WTO-inconsistent mandatory GCC food product shelf-life standards.

As is the case for all of us, however, there are areas for improvement. One issue relates to notifications, an important aspect of our work here at the WTO because it forms the basis on which our governments communicate with one another about our trade policies and practices. Qatar's difficulty in submitting notifications is a recurring theme in our questions, many of which relate to areas - such as import licensing, state trading, customs valuation, and subsidies and countervailing measures - where notifications have not been made or where certain practices may exist that are not consistent with the information in Qatar's notifications. On import licensing, for example, Qatar's notification simply states that Qatar does not have any import licensing procedures, but we note the reference in the Secretariat Report that import licensing applies to most imports. In the course of this review, we would appreciate more information from Qatar on the operation of its import licensing system as well as a clarification on whether foreign suppliers are eligible to receive import licenses. Also, we invite Qatar to update or submit its notifications, as appropriate.

A second issue we would like to highlight is the complexity of Qatar's import regime. Our understanding is that only Qatari nationals may act as local agents, distributors, or sponsors, and that the 2002 Commercial Agents Law grants agents and distributors exclusive rights to import, market, and distribute certain goods and services. We note that importers without this exclusive status may be allowed to import, provided they pay a special five-percent charge over and above other fees and duties. Moreover, the Secretariat Report appears to suggest that importers may be required to have a physical presence in Qatar. At first glance, the interplay of all these requirements seems highly burdensome, and we hope Qatar will shed light on these practices and the scope of their application during the course of this review.

On investment, Qatar's recent initiatives to open some services sectors to foreign investment are steps in the right direction, but there is farther to go. In particular, we encourage Qatar to carefully consider whether existing investment restrictions - such as special approval requirements for investments above the 49-percent foreign equity cap and the need to get cabinet approval for any investment in the banking and insurance sectors - are helping Qatar to fulfill its untapped potential as an in-

vestment destination. We note that most WTO Members, including some of Qatar's neighbors, administratively approve investment applications in order to provide a speedy, fair, and transparent process.

In addition, we would like to make the related point that foreign investors do tend to favor locations that provide strong and effective intellectual property protection. The Secretariat Report indicates that Qatar has encountered some difficulties in enforcing its copyright laws, and we are not sure that Qatar's intellectual property legislation is in full conformity with TRIPS requirements. We encourage Qatar to take appropriate steps to address copyright piracy and to bring its legislation into full compliance with TRIPS obligations, measures that would further enhance Qatar's status as an investment destination.

In conclusion, Chair, we believe Qatar is making impressive progress on the economic front, and that its economic policies are essentially on the right track. The United States shares a positive and supportive economic partnership with Qatar, and we hope that Qatar will find this review to be useful in its reform efforts and in its participation at the WTO. Minister Al-Thani, we wish you and your team a successful review, and we look forward to further cooperation with Qatar, both here at the WTO and in our bilateral exchanges. Thank you.

U.S. AGENCIES IMPROVE VISA PROCESSING, REPORT FINDS

Agencies speed security checks on international travelers

A U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report issued February 18 finds that the Department of State has significantly reduced the time required for processing of visa applications from international travelers coming to the United States to work or study in scientific or technical fields.

The report says that processing a visa under what is known as the Visa Mantis procedure now requires about 15 days, compared to an average of 67 days when the GAO studied the same process about a year ago.

A statement from State Department spokesman Richard Boucher noted the “steady progress” made in improving the clearance process.

“The GAO has validated these efforts, noting that the addition of staff, investments in systems, additional guidance to officers and interagency cooperation have resulted in significant declines in processing times,” Boucher said.

Boucher also noted that the Departments of State and Homeland Security have extended the period of validity for visas approved under Mantis. Full details are available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/42212.htm>

A summary of the GAO report is available at <http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d05198high.pdf>

The text of the Boucher statement follows:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Statement By Richard Boucher, Spokesman
February 18, 2005

Departments of State and Homeland Security Announce Improved Visa Processing for International Travelers

The following is a joint announcement by U.S. Department of State Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Maura Harty and Department of Homeland Security Under Secretary for Border and Transportation Security Asa Hutchinson on improved visa processing for international visitors:

The United States continues to be a nation that welcomes international students, businesspersons and other visitors. The Departments of State and Homeland Security have worked closely over the past two years to develop visa and port of entry policies and programs that not only maintain a high degree of security for America, but also facilitate travel to the United States. We welcome travelers wishing to work, study or enjoy the diversity of our people and our land.

Today, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report citing specific improvements that have resulted in a significant reduction in visa processing times for those wishing to study or work in certain sensitive scientific or technical fields in the United States. The Departments of State and Homeland Security have made steady progress in improving the clearance process known as Visas Mantis throughout the past year. The

GAO has validated these efforts, noting that the addition of staff, investments in systems, additional guidance to officers and interagency cooperation have resulted in significant declines in processing times. Visas Mantis processing today averages less than 14 days. In addition, not only have we reduced the processing times for Visas Mantis, but we also recently extended the validity of Visas Mantis clearances, reducing the number of times a visa applicant is subject to a Washington, D.C., interagency clearance. More information may be found at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/42212.htm>.

The Departments of State and Homeland Security continue to work together to find additional means to invest in resources and refine policies to reduce visa and port of entry processing times without compromising the security of our country. It is our joint commitment to ensure that the United States has both secure borders and open doors.

Pleases Note: Most texts and transcript mentioned in the U.S. Mission Daily Bulletin are available via our homepage: www.usmission.ch

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